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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the situation of the information user in the developing countries of Africa; discusses the role of information resources in national development; delineates the most important functions of national libraries with respect to information dissemination and information utilization; explores the relationship between financial support, governance, and authority within institutions such as libraries; and examines in detail the concept of a national library in the context of the developing country, taking the role of the academic library at the University of Zambia within the Zambian social and economic environment as a case in point. A reference list is included. (JL)

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NATIONAL INFORMATION PROVISION RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA LIBRARY: A USER PERSPECTIVE

by

Maurice C. Lundu

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NATIONAL INFORMATION PROVISION RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA LIBRARY: AN USER PERSPECTIVE

by

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INTRODUCTION

In the days of Roman and Greek Civilisations many hundreds of years ago, Pliny wrote in his Natural History Libri VIII-XI something like this:

> "Unde vulgare Graeciae dictum semper aliquid novi Africam adferre."

The English translation of this Latin sentence found in the same book reads:

> This is indeed the origin of the common saying of Greece that Africa is always producing some novelty.

The Penguin Dictionary of Quotations gives the same idea in a somewhat simplified and modern adaptation when it says:

> "Ex Africa semper aliquid novi - meaning:
> There is always something new out of Africa".

For the purpose of this presentation, the preference is with the first and perhaps original translation since the idea expressed in the words "producing some novelty" does vindicate what has been the historical, economic, social and cultural development of the continent of Africa. Ever since the Greek and Roman colonisation of some parts of the continent in the period before Christ, according to the Christian belief, Africa has carried on with the tradition of producing some novelty in form of raw materials and new ideas upon which some of current thought and modern development are based. The unfortunate thing, though, is that such raw materials and new ideas have not always been used to make Africa one of the greatest continents in the world.

Her socio-economic, cultural, scientific and technological infrastructure is still immature and largely unproductive. African raw materials, ideas and knowledge have tended to be exported somewhere else where they have been digested, refined and packaged only to be exported back to Africa in one way or another for the continent's own consumption. It appears, even at this present time, this circle is likely to continue unless the African himself takes up the challenge that Pliny so poetically and prophetically enunciated and thus begin to produce some novelty that is not going to be exported raw.

In other words, the challenge to the African is to produce some novelty that is to be valuable and productive to his lot first and foremost. This paper must, therefore, be seen as an attempt to break with tradition in the provision and utilisation of information resources that either national or academic libraries are concerned with. This is an idea not very likely to be appreciated by everyone, but one that must be attempted at all cost.

THE INFORMATION USER

The first point to remember in this difficult process of parting with tradition is the importance of the information user, who I may describe as any person seeking to solve his/her problem by using any piece of information deemed relevant to his/her particular problem. This piece of information may be found in the conventional forms of information transmission like books, journals, manuscripts, formal correspondence, informal discussions, etc. or in the current technological gadgetry like computers, audio-visual materials and even person to person conversations. This information user could be actual or potential. As you can see, the title of this paper is so contrived as to make the information user the starting point of our discussion. The emphasis is on who (the user) rather than on the institution (the library). The reason for taking this view is quite simple, in my opinion at least. It is meant to answer the criticism that Charles and Stephen Harter (1) appear to level against the traditional view of library development and research when they cogently observe:

> "Most contributions to the study of libraries have been concerned more with collection of information that allows library phenomena to be identified and described, rather than for the purpose of explaining why and how library circumstances occur".

It is obvious that in descriptive studies of libraries, the stress is on the institution itself and its role in information resources collection. Very little, if any, is said about the relevance of the institution and its information resources to the needs of the information user. Indeed, this author has at one time in the past found himself being asked to describe a national library, or an academic library, or a special library in some foreign country where he has never even set his foot.

There is no doubt that national libraries in most developed countries like America, France, Russia, and up to 1972, Britain were more concerned with collection and preservation of information rather than with the needs of

the information user. This is not meant to be a criticism of the role of these national library institutions. They certainly performed this task admirably. But the problem has been that even the mojority of academic and big public libraries have tended to follow this pattern, rather blindly if I may say so. It is no surprise, therefore, that conflicts between academic and national libraries in the new countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand) in the area of information provision and utilisation are being exacerbated to the detriment of the information user. As the English proverb goes, when two elephants are fighting, it is the grass that suffers. It is the information user who suffers when the unending wrangles as to which institution should be the only national information resource centre in a country make it practically impossible for the information user to have ready access to his/her kind of information likely to solve his/her particular problem at the particular point in time. The academic library in Africa ought to try to steer out of such potential sources of conflict by making the information user the centre of all library operations, organisation and function. In an African context, it is to be assumed that the information user's access to information resources would be conditional upon a variety of factors and constraints among which would be probably be the following: his level of literacy, language in which the information is being communicated, his understanding of the subject he is dealing with, his own orientation, his own personal conditioning, his needs and above all how physically accessible is the library that may have the required information resources. Faced with such numerous constraints, why should the institutional set-up of the library add more prohibitive complications to the information user's desperation by requesting him to distinguish red from blue before he could be allowed to avail himself to information resources collected and organised by one type of library or another? Why shouldn't the information user's own needs and constraints be allowed to dictate which information resources to seek in order to solve his own particular problem? We shall return to look more closely at these issues when we come to examine the academic library in the context of the prevailing conditions in Zambia.

INFORMATION RESOURCE

In his presidential address to the joint conference of the Library Association, Institute of Information Scientists and ASLIB which took place in Sheffield, United Kingdom, September 1980, Professor Saunders referred to information as 'the "unscarce" Resource' (2). The theme of the conference: the national

provision and use of information, provides this writer with a very important aspect about information as a national resource. Perhaps, the joint conference was merely echoing some of the ideas contained in the McBride Report (3). In a nutshell, the McBride Report emphasises Unesco's concept of information as a national resource to which every citizen of a nation has a right of access as it argues

> "Freedom of information - and more specifically the right to seek, receive and impart information is a fundamental human right, indeed a prerequisite for many others."

Professor Saunders went out of his way to try to convince the participants at this very historic gathering that provision and use of information is the concern of the Library Association, ASLIB and the Institute of Information Scientists no matter what one thought about it. He even chastised the Department of Education and Science and the Local Authorities in Britain for neglecting school libraries in the country.

There is no doubt in the mind of this writer that some of the issues that Professor Saunders raised in his paper did not particularly enchant all of his listeners. That is to be expected. In a country with such a long tradition of bickering over what constitutes library science and practice, scientific and technical information (STI) and the newly emerging discipline of information science or informatics, it would be intellectually naive to think that Professor Saunder's message of unity among all professionals concerned with information handling would be accepted without a certain amount of scepticism. That is where the continent of Africa happens to be fortunate. To her credit, she has no such long traditions of differing values, beliefs and notions about information being universal, except perhaps where she has found herself at the receiving end of all the spill-outs from such differences of opinion taking place in other parts of the world. Developing countries in Africa and elsewhere should listen to such voices of enlightenment. No matter what one is inclined to think, information in Africa is, in the opinion of this writer, 'an unscarce resource'. What is scarce, however, are the means of collecting, organising, storing, and disseminating this 'unscarce resource' in a systematic and permanent way.

Furthermore, the right type of information user is not as scarce as we may be led to believe. What is really the critical problem is the proper identification of this information user and to match his needs with the available national information resources. Perhaps, user education could provide part of the solution to this vital aspect of information work.

Nevertheless, if these assumptions are proved to be true, why then should librarians be so upright about the apparent artificial distinctions between the various library systems? If Africa is to live up to her reputation of producing some novelty, now is the time to show the rest of the world that information as a national resource is indivisible. The only thing that can prove information divisible is the kind of problem that each information user brings along to the library.

LIBRARY FUNCTIONS

Everybody at this conference knows that the major functions of any type of library is the selection, organisation and dissemination of information in whatever form such information may be recorded. The kind of information so selected, organised and disseminated does not necessarily determine whether one type of library is national or academic. For example, it is not merely the kind of information resources per se that is selected, acquired and organised by the British Library that makes it more national than the academic libraries at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Both the British Library and the university libraries at Oxford and Cambridge do collect and store British national literature through legal deposit, purchase, gift, bequest and exchange programmes. In this case, one could rightly declare that the British Library and the academic libraries at Oxford and Cambridge do contain information resources that ought to be made available or accessible to the British people at national level. It is the contention of this paper that this type of arrangement is not unique to British Library practice. It is found in many other contries as well. Therefore, to argue that only a national library must be the focal point for the selection, organisation and dissemination of national information resources is a myth that ought to be renounced forthwith.

Outstanding national Librarians like Maurice Line (4), the late Sir Frank Francis (5) and international organisations such as our own IFLA and UNESCO have begun to take to task the concept of a national library as the only custodian of a nation's information resources. Certainly, the idea of document delivery currently gaining ground in the profession appears to herald a new chapter in the way that national information resources should be selected, organised and disseminated. The selection and acquisition of materials are no longer determined by the nature of information itself and the form in which such information is recorded alone. The arrival, on the scene, of new information handling technology in form of computers, audiovisual aids, on-line information retrieval systems and the like seems, in the eyes of this writer, to be on the verge of destroying the special position that many national libraries have traditionally claimed to be their own for so long. Obviously, in

the areas of information provision to support research activities of any kind, education, culture and to a small extent recreation, there is very little difference between a national and an academic library. Perhaps, one could admit, there is a slight exception in the area of preserving materials for future generations. Even so, this preservation of materials should be taken as being secondary to utilisation. The overall argument, therefore, would appear to view selection and organisation activities of library work as being only a prelude to the dissemination and utilisation of information resources to and by the information user. Whether such an information user belongs to a specific user group - that is either academic or researcher outside the academe - should not be the main concern of a library that is dealing with a resource that is hardly as 'scarce' as the economists have led us to believe. A national library carries the same functions, in most cases, as an academic library. Both of them are concerned with the selection and organisation of information resources with the ultimate objective of making this information readily accessible to the prospective information user. It is this prospective information user alone who knows his problem, and he alone must decide which library system to approach in search of the likely solution to his particular problem. What is really at issue here is for the library - national or academic - to compete for the satisfaction of the information seeker. In this way, making the information seeker aware of the existence of useful information resources must be the modus operandi of library practice. It is with this consideration in mind that this writer finds himself to be in total agreement with the implications contained in the following observation made by the McBride Report (6):

> "Our conclusions are founded on the firm conviction that communication is a basic individual right, as well as a collective one required by all communities and nations.. Every country should develop its communication patterns in accordance with its own conditions, needs, and traditions, thus strengthening its integrity, independence and self-reliance."

This observation implies that the so-called illiterate in Africa does communicate, engage in information generation and exchange of ideas in one way or another. The illiterate has a culture of his own; indeed, he has his own needs and traditions that have to be satisfied and preserved by the communication system so devised. Should he then be denied access to information resources simply because he happens not to belong to those users commonly referred to as 'elites'

with ready passports to the use of either a national or an academic library? Shouldn't library work concern itself with the information user, his information needs and his style of communication? Isn't the library one of the many channels of communication? These are, in my opinion, some of the major issues that this conference ought to address itself to: not to whether a library is national, academic or even public. The State Lenin Library activities that George Chandler (7) approvingly describes in his article come very close to an ideal type of a national library or even an academic library. Its emphasis is on the users rather than on the institution. On another level, the British Library that came into existence in 1972 does tend to give impetus to the new concept of document delivery. Reference, lending, preservation, research, education, culture and recreation are all aspects of information utilisation no matter by whom, where, how, what and above all why.

GOVERNANCE AND AUTHORITY

Legislation defines the legal authority of any organisation or institution. Again, through legislation, financial responsibilities and administrative structure are mostly outlined. Rather than make libraries more responsive to the needs of information users, legislation has tended to put bolts and screws into the operations of most library systems including the ones under discussion. Such a situation has rendered access to and utilisation of information resources practically impossible in the majority of cases. That, is perhaps, the accepted norm of human organisation since society abhors disorder. Unfortunately, legislation has tended to be the main source of potential and actual conflicts in many cases relating to library organisation in the majority of countries represented at this conference. The actual and potential conflicts that one encounters between and among established national and academic libraries could partly be traced to the nature of the legislation.

For our purpose, let us admit that governance and finance are inseparable; and if these two aspects of library organisation and administration are inseparable, it stands to reason that their influence on either facilitating information utilisation by the user and for the user or inhibiting such utilisation is certainly immeasurable. Therein lies part of the problem of library work.

The question of governance and finance is not easy to diagnose partly because the two aspects involve power and human emotions and partly because library systems are very expensive to run.

In addition, library use is not easily quantifiable in terms of cash profits made. That is why it is such a struggle to raise enough money to fund some of the most important activities of library work. Perhaps, experts and experienced librarians attending this conference will have more to say about the problems of governance and finance in relation to information resources provision and utilisation within their own national or academic library structures.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA LIBRARY

With the above general considerations in mind, it might now be useful if we took a somewhat close look at the relationship between and academic and a national library in the area of information provision and utilisation at a national level within a specific environment - in our case - Zambia.

At present, Zambia, situation in the southern part of the continent of Africa, does not have a national library in the traditional sense of the term. But she has a national network of public and school library systems. Where they exist, these are run and organised by the Zambia Library Service under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture. However, the picture is not as transparent as this brief description seems to suggest. There are basically two distinct public library services in the country: 1. public library services run and organised by municipal and town councils confined to urban areas. These are administered by the Ministry of Local Government. and 2. public library services confined to rural areas. These are the responsibility of the Zambia Library Service under the overall direction of the Ministry of Education and Culture.

A number of special libraries are also found mainly in the urban areas. The main ones to note are:

a. The National Council for Scientific Research Library with a documentation centre attached to it. As the name suggests, the nature of the information resources collected si mostly scientific and technical information (STI).

b. Mount Makulu Research Station Library: mainly concerned with information resources relating to agricultural development;

c. Bank of Zambia Library: collecting information about monetary, financial and economic policies, issues and facts within and outside Zambia.

All these libraries are based in Lusaka. On the Copperbelt, there are special libraries and archives belonging to the mining companies.
The other major libraries and information services not to forget are the college and technical libraries located both in urban areas and in some provincial rural towns like Kasama, Chipata and Livingstone. The last, but not least, information resource centre worth mentioning is the National Archives in Lusaka. This, in brief, is the picture in which the University of Zambia Library has to operate.

Fundamentally, the University of Zambia Library is like any other medium-sized academic library serving the interests of the academic community in any society. It is situated some eight kilometres east of the capital city, Lusaka. It operates a centralised library service except in the case of medical collection. This is housed at the University Teaching Hospital (UTH), also about eight kilometres from the main compus. This is where the School of Medicine is located within the University's general academic organisational framework.

In terms of internal organisation, the Library has a periodical section containing pretty close to 2000 serial titles. Its current holdings is about 200,000 volumes with an estimated final holdings of 300,000 volumes. It has a Special Collections Section handling official and government publications, an extensive Zambiana Collections, documents for the U.N.O. and its agencies, dissertations, University Collections and archival materials, and recently, has added the rapidly expanding audiovisual and oral history materials on Zambia. In essence, the University Library is similar to any academic library that one is likely to find in any academic environment. The only unique feature about this Library is that it is found in Zambia. Though Zambia counts herself as among the developing world, she does present her own unique problems too numerous to mention here.

For the purpose of this discussion, it is perhaps useful to relate the responsibilities of this Library to the general library situation briefly outlined earlier. Therefore, this gathering is politely being requested to reflect on the Library of the University of Zambia in the light of the prevailing conditions in this part of the African continent. Bearing this point in mind, this writer is again inclined to go along with the message contained in the McBride Report referred to earlier:

> "... This diversity is valuable and should be respected; there is no place for the universal application of preconceived models. Yet it should be possible to establish, in broad outline, common aims and common values in the sphere of communication, based on common interests in a world of

interdependence".

For the University of Zambia Library, the challenge is not the mere collection, selection, acquisition and organisation of information resources (important as these functions may be). Rather, it is in the role of "establishing, in broad outline, common aims and common values in the sphere of communication, based on common interests in a world of intedependence" as the McBride Report rightly argues that the major challenge is to be found.

In the preceding paragraphs in this section of the paper, a brief outline of the library situation in Zambia has been given. But according to Busha and Harter in a quotation mentioned at the beginning of this presentation, that is not enough. There is need to explain and understand why and how the University Library in Zambia happens to be what it is - a National Reference Library - and its implication to the provision of information resources at the national level. This is indeed another of the exceptional features of the University Library in Zambia. And because this factor comes closer to the theme of this conference, it is imperative that more be said about the Library's role as a National Reference Library in the context of Zambia.
To most people attending this conference, the idea of a National Reference Library implies a national library in the way the British Library, the State Lenin Library, the Library of Congress, or any developed national library operates. Hence, national reference activity is essentially associated with the national library of a country. That may be so in the context of British, French, American or Russian library practice. Most of us know why such a library situation emerged. In Zambia, one has to admit, the situation is obviously different.

The reasons in favour of designating the University of Zambia as a 'National Reference Library' for Zambia were aptly put forward by the first University Librarian who argued then:

> "It has become accepted practice in several of the newly developing countries for the University Library of the National University to be regarded in practice if not always in title, as the National Reference Library".

He went on:

> "There are sound economic reasons for this both in terms of finance, professional staff, and (not least) availability of rare materials. Inevitably much of the material necessary for all aspects of research (which should be in a national

reference collection) is basic also to university research needs, and is usually required by university within reasonable distance of its research workers (8)".

On the basis of these arguments, this writer has expanded on how the University of Zambia Library is attempting to meet this challenge in a rather hostile environment (9).

Much as one is inclined to appreciate Mr. Loveday's far-sighted approach to academic library development in a developing country, there is a slight inclination to view his reasons as being the product of his own professional upbringing and experience. What this means is that Mr. Loveday emphasises reasons of finance, nature of materials, professional staff, research for academic staff, etc. as the basis for designating an academic library as a National Reference Library. In the opinion of this writer (himself a great admirer of Mr. Loveday's current thinking about library development), the IMPORTANCE of the information user at large seems to have been, perhaps understandably, underrated.

The first section of this paper has attempted to underscore the centrality of the information user in all library operations. True, the information user in the context West or East European societies is a rare commodity in a country such as Zambia. Even at academic institutions like the University of Zambia itself, the library user is not easy to identify as both the student and the teacher are not that library oriented. Hence their use of information resources found in the library is not as pronounced as one would tend to think. But, taking communication to be universal, there is certainly room for the University of Zambia Library to improve on its utility by establishing, in broad outline, common aims and common values in the sphere of communication based on common interests in a world of interdependence. What this paper is, therefore, trying to suggest is that an academic library in a country like Zambia, would do itself a great injustice if it decided for a moment not to search and establish these common aims and common values in the area of information provision and utilisation which is the sine qua non of the existence of any library in society. The connection between the library and the community at large is to be found in the universality of communication and information provision. With reference to Zambia, such common aims and common values in the sphere of communication can be identified even outside the University community. For instance, the common aims of Zambia is to develop her own mineral, agricultural, natural

and human resources in order to better her citizens. Such kind of common aims, values and interests are not confined to the University alone. They are to be identified also among policy and decision makers, planners, professional men and women, industrial workers, agricultural and commercial workers as well as students, scholars, writers, train unionists and even among peasants in rural villages. Their common interests are based on the fact that they all belong to 'One Zambia, One Nation' according to the nation's motto; and of course, they all communicate in one way or another. Since Zambia has no national library as such, should the University Library then ignore the needs of any actual and potential information user group requiring access to its information resources simply because that user group happens not be a member of the University? What will the University Library do with the audio-visual and oral history collections, Special Collections are not to be made available to as wide an audience as organisationally possible?
Since the University has accepted the idea of being designated a National Reference Library in Zambia, it is obvious that the information resources so selected, acquired, stored and organised by the Library be made accessible to information users from far and wide. Needless to say, the majority of these would be information users are inhibited by a variety of personal and social constraints that have nothing to do with the Library itself. Such constraints could be either physical or intellectual and a host of related factors too many to enumerate here. Library function and role should not be to aggravate the already desperate situation. Rather, it should work toward facilitating accessibility to and utilisation of these information resources. Library legislation, too, should try to remove those aspects of library organisation that may be construed as being detrimental to the proper utilisation of information resources at local and national level. Unfortunately for the University of Zambia Library, the collection of information resources is impeded by the fact that there is no legal deposit regulation to support its efforts in collecting information materials to enhance its role as the National Reference Library of Zambia. It is left to the library to chase all documents as they are generated even within the country.

SUMMARY

In conclusion, this short paper has endeavoured to bring together the ideas enshrined in all aspects of library work. The developed world has given the developing countries new insights into the evolution of various library systems, but without giving enough attention to why such libraries have developed as they have. The concept of a national library has its own peculiar beginning; so has the notion of academic library. As these library systems mature side

by side, questions began to arise as to why the two systems should be allowed to develop side by side when in fact their functions and role tend to converge. They are both part of society's desire to communicate information, ideas and knowledge from generation to generation in a formal and systematic way. Consequently, the selection, organisation and dissemination of information has the user as the ultimate destination or target in both cases. To suggest that only one of them has the sole responsibility to make its information reso resources available for use at the national level is surely to miss the main reason for the existence of any library in society. In the words of the McBride Report, there are common aims and common values in the sphere of communication based on common interests in a world of interdependence. If Africa has, at the moment, any novelty to produce, it is probably in blending together the processes of communication and information exchange with the wider definition of a library that she must try to lead the way.

For Zambia, the University Library as a National Reference Library must be a novelty to prove to the library world that utilisation of information resources at the national level is not the sole responsibility of a national library. That is the challenge the Library must face with determination. Even when the question or need to establish a national library in the country does come up, the role of the Univeristy Library in the field of national information resources provision to the community at large will not very lightly be overlooked.

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